

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Since snowy plover nesting coincides with the busy beach season, there are many things Refuge visitors can do to avoid or minimize impacts on the birds.

- Do not approach birds or nests. Avoid prolonged picnicking or sunbathing near plover nesting habitat.
- Stay out of fenced or posted habitat areas and do not approach fencing.
- Dogs are prohibited at the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge (see handout for nearby dog walking locations).
- Fires and camping are prohibited at the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge.
- Dispose of garbage properly to avoid attracting plover predators. Do not feed any wildlife.
- Horses are prohibited at the Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge.
- Do not collect kelp or driftwood from the beach; it provides nesting and feeding habitat for snowy plovers.
- Do not fly kites, hang glide or toss Frisbees or balls near snowy plover nesting habitat.
- Fireworks are prohibited. Other activities causing disturbance may also be restricted.
- Please report to Refuge staff any nests, threats or disturbances to plovers.

**With your active cooperation, we can make a difference in the survival of the western snowy plover on California beaches.**

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# Western Snowy Plovers

*Sharing the Beach*



*Western snowy plover*

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## WHAT IS A SNOWY PLOVER?

The western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) is a sparrow-sized, light colored shorebird with dark patches on either side of the neck, behind the eye, and on the forehead. The Pacific coast population of the snowy plover is a federally threatened species.

## WHERE ARE THESE PLOVERS?

Plovers can be found on flat, open coastal beaches in dunes, and near stream mouths. They are well camouflaged and extremely hard to see, often crouching in small depressions taking shelter from the wind. National Wildlife Refuges and California State Park beaches provide much of the



*Snowy Plover Nest\**

suitable habitat remaining in California for this small shorebird. During the winter months, snowy plovers

eat and rest, building up fat reserves. From early spring to mid-fall, plovers nest in loose colonies, often coming back to the same beaches every year. The nests are simple scrapes in the sand with 1-3 eggs that the male warms at night, while the female does day duty. Eggs hatch in about 27 days, and within hours the chicks are searching for their food of insects and other beach invertebrates. The chicks are on their own in 30 days. But surviving those two months is the trick.

## HOW ARE THEY THREATENED?

Snowy plovers are threatened due to disturbance, predation and habitat loss. Because the birds and eggs are camouflaged, beach visitors can disturb resting birds or wander right through a nesting area, never knowing the damage they have caused. Visitor use of the beach close to nests causes adult birds to stay off the nest, exposing eggs to predators and the elements. Beach fires and fireworks disturb the nesting birds, and kites flown above look like predators. During the winter, continual disturbance uses up their stored reserves and may lower their breeding success.

Predators on the beach are also threats. Dogs chase and may catch birds or destroy nests, cats prey on birds and chicks, and even leashed dogs may appear as a danger. Native predators such as skunks, crows, ravens, and shrikes are joined by exotic predators such as the nonnative red fox to further pressure the birds.

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

The snowy plover is an important part of the interconnected web of life on the shore. Plovers have lived on California beaches for thousands of years, but today human use of their remaining beach habitat seriously threatens their survival. Once numbered in the thousands, fewer than 1500 breeding plovers remain. Prior to 1970 they nested at 53 locations in California, while today they nest in only half as many sites. Since snowy plovers are listed as a threatened species and protected by the

federal Endangered Species Act, beach visitors who harm or disturb plovers or their habitat may be cited and fined. Plovers need our help if they are to survive alongside human beach recreation.

## WHAT IS SALINAS RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE DOING TO PROTECT PLOVERS?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working closely with California State Parks, PRBO Conservation Science and other coastal land managers to cooperatively manage the plover on California's beaches. At Salinas River National Wildlife Refuge, personnel conduct surveys to determine plover numbers and nesting success.



*Snowy Plover Chick\**

Color bands are placed on plover legs so that individual birds can be identified and monitored throughout their lives. Sensitive plover areas are protected year-round by signs and seasonal fencing to prevent the public from entering. Exotic plants that affect plover nesting habitat are removed and certain recreational activities are restricted (see "*What Can I Do To Help?*").



*\*Photos © Jenny Erbes, PRBO*